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Any Victorian writer setting out to include the recent past in a national history would be faced with a considerable obstacle. They would have to transform the common currency of living memory—diverse and contradictory as it is—into a coherent narrative. How could their aspirations to a grand ‘History of England’ be reconciled with the multiplicity of the ever-changing present?¹ This article demonstrates that the messiness and open-endedness of the recent past was a site of discomfort for Victorian historians, as a historiographical academy was gradually established in the second half of the nineteenth century. Historians conscious of their precarious disciplinary position, and keen to bolster as-yet uncertain professional credentials, had little incentive to get involved in this controversial and inconclusive arena. They thus tended either to avoid contemporary history, or to approach it from an austere high-political angle. Those who did incorporate the recent past into a national—and proto-social—narrative, resorted to various defensive strategies to legitimize their assessments, which could never be more than provisional.

Writers of contemporary history have to negotiate between two polarized perspectives: immersion and overview. The immersed perspective situates the writer, and thus their reader, in the very continuum they are attempting to observe. By contrast, the perspective of overview allows time to be examined from a lofty height, as a contained spatial entity rather than a continuum. This framework enables overarching analysis and judgments, and in narratological terms offers the opportunity to examine an entire “plot”, or “fabula”, in a single glance.² While historians of the distant past typically claim authority from their ability to offer an overview of their subject-matter, this advantage is lost when they address a more recent past, particularly one within living memory. They have to choose between conjecturing as to the ultimate product of the events at hand, or embracing their state of immersion and abandoning all attempt at an elevated perspective. Despite these perennial problems, contemporary history is nonetheless ubiquitous in the twenty-first century. Oral history is an established research method, genealogy programmes and websites abound, and history-teaching in British secondary schools focuses primarily on the twentieth century.³ We have become relatively comfortable (or at least, wedded to and reliant on that most multiple of knowledge systems, the internet, obliged to be) with the idea of irreducible multiplicity. While contemporary historiography always and inevitably poses challenges, I argue that it was a focus of particular discomfort in the Victorian period. In an era of grand Whig narratives, the desire for singularity and generality could not so easily be dismissed.

¹ All the histories under examination here are histories of “England”, rather than “Britain” or “the United Kingdom”. On this tendency in nineteenth-century historiography, see David Cannadine, “British History as a ‘New Subject’?”, in *Uniting the Kingdom?: The Making of British History*, ed. Alexander Grant and Keith Stringer (London: Routledge, 1995), 16.

² It is, therefore, an approach intrinsic to the kinds of graphic mappings of collective memory that Eviatar Zerubavel argues we all engage in as a means of constructing national histories. See Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004).

³ The current curriculum for Key Stage 3 (11–14 years) focuses on the twentieth century.

<<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/secondary/b00199545/history/programme/range>> [accessed 23 August 2013], and this trend is exacerbated in the A-level syllabus.

<<http://filestore.aqa.org.uk/subjects/AQA-2040-W-SP.PDF>> [accessed 23 August 2013]

Education minister Michael Gove’s proposed changes to the 2014 curriculum would implement something of a return to the Victorian rationale of distant history as most suitable for children: primary school pupils will cover a period from the Stone Age to 1066.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/210969/NC_framework_document_-_FINAL.pdf> [accessed 18 July 2013]

The opening section of this article will examine the hostility to contemporary history in the nascent university discipline established in the second half of the nineteenth century. Then it will move to consider in more depth three Victorian national histories that do include the recent past: Harriet Martineau's History of England During the Thirty Years' Peace (1849); J. R. Green's A Short History of the English People (1874); and Spencer Walpole's History of England from the Conclusion of the Great War in 1815 (1878). While these are by no means the only Victorian histories to cover the recent past, they are all distinctive in aiming to provide a wide view that embraces social as well as political history. This gives them greater challenges of prioritisation than those which take a more narrowly thematic approach. Economic histories by John Wade (1833) and Anton Menger (1886; English translation 1899) tie their present era into a specifically single-strand narrative.⁴ Several other writers, such as Albany Fonblanque (1837), John Roebuck (1852), William Molesworth (1871) and Justin McCarthy (1880), focus solely on the high-political dimension of their chosen period.⁵ Although, as I will go on to show, my case studies are less than wholly successful in writing social history, these political histories explicitly decline to attempt the wider social scope aspired to by Martineau, Green and Walpole. As a result, they are not subject to quite the same problems of selection in the face of an overwhelmingly multiple and multifarious population. Similarly absent from the present discussion are edited collections, such as Thomas Humphry Ward's The Reign of Queen Victoria: A Survey of Fifty Years of Progress (1887). This form avoids many of the problems of authorial authority I analyse here, and in each section of the text, a different writer takes a different theme. The fact that it does not view itself as a national history in the same category as those discussed in this essay is evident in its citation of Spencer Walpole's History of England from the Conclusion of the Great War in its Introduction: Ward does not see his text as a competitor.

Each of this article's three case-study texts negotiates the challenge of writing the recent past as history in different ways. Certain characteristics unite them all: none of these writers ever held an academic post, and they claimed authority as public intellectuals rather than as expert professionals.⁶ However, they wrote in quite different historiographical cultures. When Harriet Martineau undertook the challenge of completing Charles Knight's attempt at a post-Napoleonic history, she was writing in a pre-disciplinary environment. Her text thus refuses to choose between overview and immersion, and instead tries to juggle the two. She embraces her role of witness in a history that is relatively personal and experiential, while also gesturing outwards to grand narratives. J. R. Green, writing a quarter of a century later, in some respects resisted the tide of his proto-scientific contemporaries, and sought instead to offer an engaging—and commercially viable—narrative in what Rosemary Mitchell has usefully characterized as the “picturesque” mode.⁷ Green is in some respects the most immersive of our historians: in his depictions of chronologically distant—especially

⁴ John Wade, History of the Middle and Working Classes (London: Effingham Wilson, 1833); Anton Menger, The Right to the Whole Produce of Labour: the Origin and Development of the Theory of Labour's Claim to the Whole Product of Industry, ed. H. S. Foxwell, trans. M. E. Tanner (London: Macmillan, 1899).

⁵ Albany Fonblanque, England Under Seven Administrations (London: Bentley, 1837); John Roebuck, History of the Whig Ministry of 1830 to the Passing of the Reform Bill (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1852); William Nassau Molesworth, The History of England from the Year 1830–1874, 3 vols. (London: Chapman & Hall, 1871); Justin McCarthy, A History of Our Own Times, from the Accession of Queen Victoria to the General Election of 1880, 4 vols. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1880).

⁶ On the changing status of the “intellectual” and the “academy”, see T. W. Heyck, The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England (London: Croom Helm, 1982); Reba N. Soffer, Discipline and Power: The University, History, and the Making of an English Elite, 1870–1930 (Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 1994).

⁷ Rosemary Mitchell, Picturing the Past: English History in Text and Image, 1830–1870 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).

medieval—life, he draws colorful portraits and scenes with zeal. He embraces the intimate approach for time periods beyond living memory. These are historical periods he can imagine without compunction, over the experience of which he cannot be contradicted, and over which he feels he can also adjudicate from a lofty perspective. When it comes to his own century, however, he declines to pass judgment on either its experiential nature or conclusive meaning, shrinking from anything more than a sparse catalogue of political maneuvers. Spencer Walpole, Green's chronological contemporary but moving in very different circles, a civil servant of the British Crown, most decisively seeks to "codify" the lessons of his era.⁸ His is a technique reminiscent of the Enlightenment: he aims to use the data at his disposal to point to England's current position and trajectory on a stadial timeline. To this end, he offers the reader an overview, attempting to trace trends and draw morals from this schematic perspective, and attempting to claim narratorial authority not as a historical witness, but from a position of lofty detachment.

Discomfort with contemporary history

The necessity of chronological distance from one's material was a subject of debate and division among historians, as their subject found a university foothold in the second half of the nineteenth century. Important work has been done by J. W. Burrow in demonstrating the centrality of grand narratives—particularly the Whig narrative of national progress—to Victorian historiography.⁹ A denser picture has since been built up of changes in the historiographical scene over the nineteenth century, which has emphasized the transformative effects of professionalization. These included hardening the edges of the discipline to exclude practitioners of more particularist and less generalizing approaches (the archaeologist and the antiquarian);¹⁰ increasing the sway of the publisher as the market grew for popular and school-orientated History textbooks;¹¹ and emphasizing the "scientific" over the "artistic" elements of the historical enterprise.¹² There has been no sustained attention, however, to what we might see as the confluence of these issues: what was the effect of the professionalizing drive on that section of historiography where it was most difficult either to sustain a unified narrative, or claim the kind of distanced objectivity necessary for a "scientific" approach: contemporary-history-writing?

The notion of "boundary-work", a term of Thomas F. Gieryn's that Ian Hesketh has fruitfully drawn on in explaining the exclusion of J. A. Froude from the realm of acceptable history-writing in the 1850s and 1860s, is particularly useful for this analysis.¹³ This evocative term refers to the process of establishing a secure and exclusive disciplinary space for science

⁸ H. C. G. Matthew, "Walpole, Sir Spencer (1839–1907)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36712>.

⁹ J. W. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981).

¹⁰ Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England 1838–1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986).

¹¹ Leslie Howsam, *Past into Print: The Publishing of History in Britain, 1850–1950* (London and Toronto: The British Library and U of Toronto P, 2009).

¹² Ian Hesketh, *The Science of History in Victorian Britain: Making the Past Speak* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011).

¹³ Ian Hesketh, "Diagnosing Froude's Disease: Boundary Work and the Discipline of History in Late-Victorian Britain," *History and Theory* 47 (October 2008): 373–95; Thomas F. Gieryn, "Boundary-Work and the Demarcation of Science from Non-Science: Strains and Interests in Professional Ideologies of Scientists," *American Sociological Review* 46, no. 6 (December 1983): 782. Froude's exclusion from the academic historical community did not result from attention to contemporary history; his approach was viewed rather as insufficiently rigorous and conscientious, placing disproportionate weight on unrepresentative examples. The idea of 'boundary-work', however, applies equally well to the temporal issue.

by labeling undesirable elements as “unscientific”. In the field of history, the second half of the nineteenth century saw such a process of boundary-work, in part rejecting subject-matter deemed too recent.¹⁴ Some of the discipline’s founding practitioners consciously demarcated its remit by refusing to teach contemporary history. William Stubbs’ famous pronouncement to an 1876 Oxford lecture-theatre that “modern politics” should be eschewed in the curriculum is especially notable for the fact that, in his eyes, this extended to include “the Great Rebellion” and “the struggles of puritanism and absolutism” of the seventeenth century.¹⁵ This comment gives weight to W. E. H. Lecky’s famous assertion that “We are cavaliers and roundheads before we are Liberals and Conservatives”.¹⁶ The seventeenth century is deemed especially unsuitable for study because it is a period of civil war whose issues are apparently still contentious.¹⁷ Political controversy, however, was not the only reason to avoid contemporary-historiography. Ralph Waldo Emerson’s review of *Past and Present* (1843) epitomizes the widespread dictum that “the truth of the present hour, except in particulars and single relations, is unattainable.”¹⁸ The recent past was too messy, too “particular”, and—especially when still present in a myriad of living memories—too irreducibly multiple to lend itself easily to authoritative narratives or definitive judgments. In an Oxford-based case study, Michael Riordan has recently shown that led by the example of Stubbs’s *Select Charters*, late-nineteenth-century historians prioritized the publication of selected documents over unfiltered archival work.¹⁹ This reluctance to get mired in the archive gives added force to, rather than detracting from, Philippa Levine’s thesis, as it exacerbated these historians’ need to assert a rhetoric of professionalism. Late-nineteenth-century historians denigrated the older—and “lesser”—practices of antiquarianism as lacking the detachment and generalizing ability of historiography. They claimed to retain a distance from their material which was both emotional—removed from the necrophilic obsession that Mike Goode has traced as a growing stereotype of the antiquary²⁰—and temporal.

This issue was not without its contenders. At Cambridge, Stubbs’s professorial equivalent, J. R. Seeley, saw the new discipline very differently, less interested in the historian’s archival role than in his educative role. He appropriated the rhetoric of the liberal education to claim for History, as had been claimed for Classics and Mathematics, the ability to train the mind—with the added advantage that a study of modern history supplies the student with practical information applicable to future statesmanship in the civil service and government. In his view, the valuable substance of history was its political dimension, and specifically the history of states. In fact, as Deborah Wormell characterizes his approach, “whether an event was ‘historical’ or not was determined by its content, not chronology”.²¹ As he declared in his inaugural professorial lecture, he proposed to use the term “history” “without any thought of time past or present. There are multitudes of past occurrences which do not belong, in my view, to history, and there are multitudes of phenomena belonging to the

¹⁴ For examples of university syllabuses, and example History exam questions, see Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional*, 141.

¹⁵ William Stubbs, *Seventeen Lectures on the Study of Medieval and Modern History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), 53.

¹⁶ W. E. H. Lecky, “The Political Value of History,” [1892] in *Historical and Political Essays* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908), 19.

¹⁷ See Timothy Lang, *The Victorians and the Stuart Heritage: Interpretations of a Discordant Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995).

¹⁸ [Ralph Waldo Emerson], “Past and Present,” *The Dial* 4 (July 1844): 98.

¹⁹ Michael Riordan, “Printing, Selection and the Cataloguing of Oxford Archives, c. 1850–1950,” *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 32, no. 1 (April 2011): 51–62.

²⁰ Mike Goode, *Sentimental Masculinity and the Rise of History, 1790–1890* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009).

²¹ Deborah Wormell, *Sir John Seeley and the Uses of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980), 43.

present time which do.”²² As a result, for Seeley, there was no inherent reason why more contemporary history could not become part of the curriculum, and his own *The Expansion of England* (1883), on the recent history of the British Empire, emerged from two of his Cambridge lecture series. This was not, however, the kind of all-embracing “history of the people” espoused by Martineau, Green and Walpole. In an article of 1879, he insisted that emergent social history should be carried out in a newly segregated way.

“Manners and customs”, so called, instead of having a larger number of chapters in our histories, should have histories to themselves. The child is grown up; should it then have a larger share in the house? No, but it should have a house of its own. And that means that it should have no place at all in the original house.²³

This historiographical model effectively severs the conceptual link between politics and society. Seeley was therefore not invested in addressing quite the same problems of multiplicity and particularity that Martineau, Green and Walpole confronted in their attempts to write all-encompassing histories of the recent past.

The tension present in these disciplinary maneuverings, and the frustration for those who wanted to envisage a unified discipline, is evident in an article of 1884. Mandell Creighton (soon to become the first Dixie Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Cambridge) opined that “Everyone will sympathize with his [Seeley’s] regret that English history is pronounced less interesting as it approaches our own day.”²⁴ However, the ideal reader this passage evokes evidently does not represent “everyone”, since if it were so, who is the source of the unidentified orthodoxy that “pronounce[s]” recent history “less interesting”? And even this apparent clarion cry for the study of the recent past is immediately undermined by an explanation: “This is no doubt owing to the fact that modern historians are not clear about the point which they are working up to.” Later he adds, in a shift towards condescension: “The modern historian cannot be overwise. He may be pardoned if, while the issue of events is doubtful, he directs his attention chiefly to those whose influence is most keenly felt.”²⁵ It is ambiguous whether the verb “cannot” is a lament or an injunction; whether Creighton is recognizing the modern historian’s lack of hindsight as a sad but unavoidable fact, or berating those who attempt excessively authoritative judgments.²⁶ In either case, history-writing of the recent past is characterized as provisional and therefore impermanent.

A “history of the world” or “history of Britain” published today, whatever its ideological stance, most commonly ends with a consideration of the contemporary situation.²⁷ By contrast, the status quo among nineteenth-century historians—one inherited from their predecessors—was to close the discussion at some chronological remove from the present day. David Hume’s monumental *History of England* (1754–62), the text which, as Mitchell has shown, remained the primary history textbook until a long way into the nineteenth

²² J. R. Seeley, “The Teaching of Politics:— an Inaugural Lecture Delivered at Cambridge,” in *Lectures and Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1870), 302.

²³ J. R. Seeley, “History and Politics,” *Macmillan’s Magazine* 40, no. 238 (August 1879): 297.

²⁴ Mandell Creighton, “Modern History,” *Contemporary Review* 45 (February 1884): 281.

²⁵ Creighton, 282.

²⁶ “Hindsight” is a slightly anachronistic term, since the *OED* lists its first recorded use as a corollary of ‘foresight’ in 1883. However, it is useful here in bringing together the notion of temporal distance with that of clarity of vision. See “Hindsight,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed October 16, 2013, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/87082?redirectedFrom=hindsight#eid>.

²⁷ See Kenneth O. Morgan, *The Oxford History of Britain*, (Oxford: OUP, 1984; updated edition 2010); Simon Schama, *A History of Britain, Volume III: The Fate of Empire, 1776–2000* (London: BBC, 2002); Rebecca Fraser, *A People’s History of Britain* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2003).

century, closed with the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688.²⁸ It was repeatedly updated by later writers (including Tobias Smollett in 1760–65, in an edition published after Hume’s death in 1777; T. S. Hughes in 1834; and Henry Stebbings in 1838), but these were all conceived as “continuations” rather than as stand-alone histories in their own right.²⁹ Henry Hallam’s Constitutional History of England (1823) runs, as its subtitle announces, ‘from the accession of Henry VII, to the death of George II’ in 1760.³⁰ John Lingard’s *History of England* (1819–30) proposed a revisionist, Catholic interpretation, but approached no nearer the present than Hume, narrating from the Roman invasion of Britain to 1688.³¹ When Charles Dickens undertook A Child’s History of England, serialized in *Household Words* between January 1851 and December 1853, he evidently felt similarly constrained, despite the less formal publication genre and context, and a willingness otherwise to express partisanship. He offered a similar chronological remit to Lingard’s, starting with “the Ancient Times” and coming to a sudden halt with the Glorious Revolution. The final installment, which follows the narration of this apparently momentous event, opens with the peremptory declaration: “I have now arrived at the close of my history. The events which succeeded the famous Revolution of one thousand six hundred and eighty-eight, would nether be easily related nor easily understood in such a book as this.”³² Thomas Macaulay initially speculated that his History of England from the Accession of James the Second (1848–59) might extend to “the death of George the Fourth” (in 1830), but as he acknowledged, “there are great and obvious objections to contemporary history.”³³ It was ultimately curtailed by its over-ambitious remit, and halted at the death of William III, in 1702.

This does not mean that histories that approached a more recent past, or were constructed to continue to the present and even into the future, were never published in the nineteenth century. These works, however, were typically undertaken by more radical writers. Winwood Reade’s militantly agnostic world history, The Martyrdom of Man (1872), telling the story of mankind’s emergence out of religion towards rationalism and featuring a chapter on “The Future of the Human Race”, faced “a bitterly or contemptuously hostile literary and newspaper press” and was never likely to become a library or classroom classic.³⁴ The Chartist Robert Gammage published a History of the Chartist Movement in 1854 that of necessity extended right up to his present. Despite protestations of objectivity, however, this was unsurprisingly a politically charged text, and indeed his Preface closes with a wish that “his effort, however humble, will not be deemed unworthy of a place in the historical and political literature of his country.”³⁵ J. R. Green’s Short History of the English People (1874), which was vilified by some reviewers as a radical democratic manifesto, still shies away, as this article will demonstrate further below, from freely discussing the history of his own

²⁸ David Hume, The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Cæsar to the Revolution in 1688, 8 vols. (London: A. Millar, 1783). See Mitchell, Picturing the Past, 34–55.

²⁹ See Mitchell, 43, 45.

³⁰ Henry Hallam, The Constitutional History of England: From the Accession of Henry VII to the Death of George II, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1842).

³¹ John Lingard, The History of England: From the First Invasion by the Romans to the Accession of William and Mary in 1688, 9 vols., 6th ed. (London: C. Dolman, 1855). See Peter Phillips, *John Lingard: Priest and Historian* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2008).

³² Charles Dickens, “A Child’s History of England,” Household Words VIII, no. 194 (December 10, 1853): 360.

³³ George Otto Trevelyan, The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay, vol. 2 (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1876), 13–14.

³⁴ John Robertson, “Introduction,” in The Martyrdom of Man, by Winwood Reade (London: Watts & Co., 1924), vii.

³⁵ R. G. Gammage, History of the Chartist Movement, 1837–1854 (Newcastle-on-Tyne: Browne & Browne, 1894), x. My italics.

lifetime.³⁶ It was left to his widow, Alice Stopford Green, to add—in a posthumous edition of 1916—an epilogue which updated the *History* to her present.³⁷ This substitution reveals two very interesting elements of the shifting attitude towards hindsight. Stopford Green appears to invest in it enough to feel that her husband's epilogue was limited by his lack of it. On the other hand, her replacement shows that by the Edwardian period, when History had become more securely established in the academy, the implicit embargo on contemporary history had eased.³⁸ Her history continues right up to her present, in the midst of the First World War.

Harriet Martineau

Harriet Martineau's *History of England During the Thirty Years' Peace* (1849), authored by a "miscellaneous writer"³⁹ at a point when the process of disciplinary boundary-work had not yet begun in earnest, goes further than Green or Walpole were later able to in challenging the necessity of temporal distance. Martineau (1802–76) has not been ignored in modern Victorian studies: there is a notable body of criticism on her place in the histories of sociology and feminism,⁴⁰ and on her *Autobiography*.⁴¹ Her *History of England* has recently drawn new attention for its relationship to this autobiography,⁴² as well as for its national and imperial implications,⁴³ but there has been little specific recognition of its anomalous status as a history of the recent past. Although her only distinguished female predecessor, Catharine Macaulay, had begun a *History of England from the Revolution to the Present Time in a Series of Letters to a Friend* (1778), her focus was solely on political history, and only the first volume was ever completed (covering 1688 to 1733).⁴⁴ Martineau's work, by contrast, both attempts a social panorama, and takes as its subject area the thirty years following the Battle of Waterloo, 1815 to 1846, concluding a mere three years before its publication. Her *History* thus begins where Green's ends, and covers much the same temporal ground as Walpole's; since Walpole's text was written from the late 1870s onwards, however, Martineau's 1849 viewpoint is much closer to the events it describes, and its attempt to

³⁶ See John Sherren Brewer, "A Short History of the English People. By J. R. Green," *The Quarterly Review* 141, no. 282 (April 1876): 285–23.

³⁷ J. R. Green, *A Short History of the English People*, ed. Alice Stopford Green (London: Macmillan, 1916).

³⁸ See, for example, H. D. Traill and J. S. Mann, eds., *Social England: A Record of the Progress of the People*, 6 vols. (London: Cassell & Co., 1897), which extended to 1885; H. O. Arnold-Forster, *A History of England from the Landing of Julius Caesar to the Present Day* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1897), which, when reissued in 1904, extended right up to 1901; Herbert Paul, *A History of Modern England*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1906), which extended to 1895; C. R. L. Fletcher and Rudyard Kipling, *A School History of England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), which gave an overview of the Victorian period.

³⁹ Leslie Stephen, "Harriet Martineau," *The Dictionary of National Biography*, 1893, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/olddnb/18228>. Accessed 21 May 2013.

⁴⁰ Valerie K. Pichanick, *Harriet Martineau: The Woman and Her Work, 1802–76* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1980); Deirdre David, *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy: Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987); Michael R. Hill and Susan Hoecker-Drysdale, eds., *Harriet Martineau: Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Caroline Roberts, *The Woman and the Hour: Harriet Martineau and Victorian Ideologies* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2002).

⁴¹ Mitzi Myers, "Harriet Martineau's Autobiography: The Making of a Female Philosopher," in *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Estelle Jelinek (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1980), 53–70; Linda H. Peterson, *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography: The Poetics and Politics of Life Writing* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1999).

⁴² Alexis Easley, 'Harriet Martineau: Gender, National Identity, and the Contemporary Historian', *Women's History Review*, 20 (November 2011), 765–84.

⁴³ Deborah A. Logan, *Harriet Martineau, Victorian Imperialism, and the Civilizing Mission* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2010).

⁴⁴ Bridget Hill, *The Republican Virago: The Life and Times of Catharine Macaulay*, *Historian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 45–6.

present them as “historical” all the more radical. Already an established journalist when she wrote her *History*, she embraces the immediacy of the “history of one’s own times”. It is striking that when, in 1863, her *History* was republished in America, Martineau added an additional chapter which brought the text up to 1854.⁴⁵ Strangely, she claimed to have written this piece as if in the midst of the Crimean War, “as if it were written in 1855 rather than 1863”, a stance that makes a virtue of immediacy and lack of hindsight.⁴⁶ It privileges, even fetishizes the immersed perspective, in a way strikingly at odds with the later-nineteenth-century emphasis on detachment we have already traced.

Its immersed perspective is, moreover, not the only way in which it seeks to modify historical convention. Its allusive title signalling at once an equivalence and contrast to the Thirty Years’ War, Martineau seeks to demonstrate that war is not the only state of interest, and military history not the only type worth studying. In fact, she argues, peacetime, far from being static or boring, is where real change takes place. After a passage describing the episodes of disorder that broke out during the campaign for the Reform Bill, she adds:

It is necessary to note the social disturbances which followed upon the rejection of the Second Reform Bill; but it is no less necessary to point out, that the turbulence of this, as of all seasons, is easy to observe, while no account can be given which can represent to the imagination the prevailing calmness and order of the time. Calmness and order present no salient point for narrative and description: but their existence must not therefore be overlooked. A truly heroic state of self-discipline and obedience to law prevailed over the land, while in particular spots the turbulent were able to excite the giddy and the ignorant to riot. The nation was steadily rising to its most heroic mood; that mood in which, the next year, it carried through the sublime enterprize which no man, in the darkest moment, had any thought of surrendering.⁴⁷

Thus Martineau flatters her reader by appealing to her/him to look past the illusion of dynamism created by the sound and fury of disorder, to see the heroism latent in “self-discipline and obedience to law”. Indeed, she seeks to bolster both her and her reader’s intellectual credentials by claiming for them both the ability to see beyond apparent monotony to the real source of historical change.

This passage is strikingly redolent of Thomas Carlyle’s stance in *The French Revolution: A History* (1837). Stance is an appropriate term here, as Carlyle often locates the source of his narratorial viewpoint in a realm both geographically and temporally outside that of his narrative. In a passage about the night before the final collapse of the Bourbon Monarchy on 10th August 1792, for example, he takes us on a journey whose physical impossibility—and demonic associations—do not detract from its vividness.

Could the Reader take an Asmodeus’s Flight, and waving open all roofs and privacies, look down from the Tower of Notre Dame, what a Paris were it! Of treble-voice whimperings or vehemence, or bass-voice growlings, dubitations; Courage screwing itself to desperate defiance; Cowardice trembling silent within barred doors;—and all round, Dulness calmly snoring.⁴⁸

In an echo of this Carlylean style, Martineau claims to view “the land” from an elevated, almost supernatural perspective, able to survey both the overall picture and zoom in on “spots” of particular interest. She stated in an earlier work that “to stand on the highest

⁴⁵ Harriet Martineau, *The History of England from the Commencement of the XIXth Century to the Crimean War*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1864)

⁴⁶ Robert Kiefer Webb, *Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian* (London: Heinemann, 1960), 278.

⁴⁷ Martineau, *The History of England During the Thirty Years’ Peace*, II, 50.

⁴⁸ Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution: A History*, vol. 2 (London: Chapman & Hall, 1896), 291.

pinnacle is the best way of obtaining an accurate general view, in contemplating a society as well as a city”, and this approach is also evident in her *History*.⁴⁹ These two similarly uncategorisable writers, working at the intersections of various genres, shared a friendship in the late 1830s, although they drifted apart as they recognized the insurmountable ideological differences between them: Carlyle’s mystical theology was not easily compatible with Martineau’s rather dogmatic Positivism.⁵⁰ He evocatively characterized her as “a soul clean as river sand, but which would evidently grow no flowers of our planting.”⁵¹ However, these two writers arguably shared more than perhaps they realized in their approach to history-writing.

Both writers use free and often disembodied indirect discourse in their histories, a technique many readers found disconcerting. In his *French Revolution*, Carlyle gives the reader passages like the following, on Charlotte Corday’s plan to assassinate Marat:

About eight on the Saturday morning, she purchases a large sheath-knife in the Palais Royal; then straightway, in the Place des Victoires, takes a hackney-coach: “To the Rue de l’Ecole de Médecine, No. 44.” It is the residence of the Citoyen Marat!—The Citoyen Marat is ill, and cannot be seen; which seems to disappoint her much. Her business is with Marat, then? Hapless beautiful Charlotte; hapless squalid Marat!⁵²

John Rosenberg comments that “Nothing is more characteristic of The French Revolution than these narrative glides from third person to first and back again. With the enhanced mobility of the dramatic present, the narrator crosses the barriers of time, place and person that separate then from now, there from here, they from we, thought from speech.”⁵³ The influence of this can be traced in Martineau’s *History*. During the struggle over the first Reform Bill, we are told,

Lord Abermarle was at his late breakfast, but started up on the entrance of Lord Durham, asking what was the matter. “You must have the King’s carriages ready instantly.”—“The King’s carriages! Very well: I will just finish my breakfast.”—“Finish your breakfast! Not you! You must not lose a moment. The King ought to be at the House.”—“Lord bless me! Is there a revolution?”—“Not at this moment; but there will be if you stay to finish your breakfast.”—So the tea and roll were left, and the royal carriages drove up to the palace in an incredibly short time.⁵⁴

This style by no means met with universal approval: as Valerie Sanders comments, it read “rather oddly in a serious history”.⁵⁵ Although enacted with less virtuosity than Carlyle, we can see it as an attempt to follow his example. The notable effect of this style is to bring the iconic figures of the past down to an equal level with her reader: even Lord Abermarle eats breakfast—late—and has difficulty in shaking off immediate culinary concerns to attend to those of state.

Perhaps the most significant point of overlap with Carlyle’s approach to history is Martineau’s insistence on the significance of the silent multitude. As the passage quoted above about “calmness and order” demonstrates, her *History* works to shift attention from military activity and the outstanding “heroic” individual to the quiet, faceless majority. Both writers, however, struggled with the challenge this posed. Despite avowing the value of

⁴⁹ Harriet Martineau, *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (London: Charles Knight and Co., 1838), 50.

⁵⁰ Valerie Sanders, *Reason over Passion: Harriet Martineau and the Victorian Novel* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986), 11–12.

⁵¹ Thomas Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, ed. J. A. Froude, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1881), 216.

⁵² Thomas Carlyle, *The Complete Works of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. Henry Duff Traill, vol. IV (London: Chapman & Hall, 1896), 168.

⁵³ John D. Rosenberg, *Carlyle and the Burden of History* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), 77.

⁵⁴ Martineau, *The History of England During the Thirty Years’ Peace*, II, 35.

⁵⁵ Sanders, *Reason over Passion: Harriet Martineau and the Victorian Novel*, 122.

unremarkable people, they found it impossible to represent them as individuals, and Carlyle's *French Revolution* is infamous for its tumultuous scenes in which the crowd seems a protagonist with a will of its own. In Martineau's writing we can see a dialectic of apparently antithetical desires. She evidently wants to claim these apparently insignificant individuals for her *History*, but simultaneously yearns to be able to characterize this multiplicity as a unified entity. Her solution to this problem is to figure them as "the nation". The trope of "nation" offers an alternative, atemporal axis to the contentious one of distant and proximate past, and sidesteps the conflict of immersion versus overview.

J. R. Green

J. R. Green (1837–1883) now generally features in the story of nineteenth-century historiography as an adjunct to other historians. Although illuminating work has been done by Rosemary Jann on his contribution to and place in the milieu of mid-Victorian historiography, and more recently by Ian Hesketh, he is not guaranteed a substantial place in every survey of Victorian historians.⁵⁶ Often mentioned as a Teutonist follower of William Stubbs, or as a protégé of Edward Freeman, he never held an academic post in a period when this was gradually becoming the route to historical credibility. His *Short History of the English People* (1874), however, was one of the best-selling history books of the century, appealing to a general audience and tracing a compelling narrative of a nation he saw descending from the Anglo-Saxon settlers of the seventh century. It was a one-volume version of the traditional "multi-volume history": it purported to cover everything, but did so in an affordable and physically manageable form. What is more, Green broke with the convention of structuring his text by regnal dates, an approach he defended with the declaration that "I won't divide by Kings, a system whereby History is made Tory unawares and infants are made to hate history".⁵⁷ This controversial decision effectively proclaimed that monarchs are not always the most important contributors to historical change, transferring agency to "the people". The identity and breadth of the "people" of Green's title, however, is open to question. The vast majority of his *History* is populated with the monarchs and ministers familiar to political history. Not only were the necessary archival sources not always available (especially writing, as Green did, from his invalid sick-bed), but he prioritized a "picturesque" and engaging narrative, rich in anecdotes about well-known individuals. A quantitative comparison by Gertrude Himmelfarb of the relative proportions of political and military history, compared to social and economic history (by the simple expedient of counting the number of pages assigned to each topic), concludes that Green's practice is less radical than his intentions.⁵⁸

Green declared in his diary as early as 1862 that he planned on becoming the "historian of England", but added,

With full consciousness of many great deficiencies, I devote myself to the task. The greatest of them is, perhaps, a dislike for abstract thought, which would ever tempt me to subordinate general tendencies to particular events and principles to individuals. But by two great helps I can—and by God's help, purpose to bring to its execution—unflinching labour and an earnest desire for Truth. . . . I pray God, in whose name and

⁵⁶ Burrow recognizes his potential eligibility for substantial treatment, but ultimately chooses to address Freeman instead. Jann, however, grants him a chapter of his own; Hesketh discusses him in the context of publishing, in tandem with Freeman. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent*, 7; Rosemary Jann, *The Art and Science of Victorian History* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1985); Hesketh, *Science of History*.

⁵⁷ Qtd. Anthony Brundage, *The People's Historian: John Richard Green and the Writing of History in Victorian England* (London: Greenwood Press, 1994), 105.

⁵⁸ Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The New History and the Old: Critical Essays and Reappraisals* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1987), 152.

to whose glory I undertake this work, to grant me in it, above all, the earnest love and patient toil after historical truth.⁵⁹

Here Green briefly aligns himself with the kind of multiplicity and particularity characteristic of the recent past. This alignment is seen as a source of shame: it is a sinful “tempt[ation]” and “the greatest . . . of many great deficiencies”. Green’s lament demonstrates the speed with which disciples of Ranke and Stubbs managed to transform the norms of the historical discipline. Only a few decades later, when particularity had been effectively reclaimed for the discipline via the medium of the archive, historians were proudly declaring an eye for minute details.⁶⁰ In 1862, however, history had not yet even become a subject of university study in its own right, and Green views his own leanings as inappropriate for a student of history. To counteract his natural tendency towards the particular, Green seeks refuge in “unflinching labour and an earnest desire for Truth”. Through these dual supports of hard graft and a yearning for a capitalized, transcendent singularity, he hopes to gain the fruits of the “abstract thought” to which he feels unsuited. While he capitalizes this first use of “Truth”, however, when it returns at the end of the passage it has been re-formulated and qualified as ‘historical truth’. This slippage encapsulates a moment of transition between two modes of history. The Romantic transcendence of Carlyle’s capitalized “History” and “Truth” gives way to a more modest, Stubbsian image of ‘historical truth’ that can be attained through small-scale dedicated labor and attention to detail.

Green’s brief self-identification with the particularity associated with the recent past does not, however, lead him to focus his History on this period. The Short History’s single volume, which had begun with the first Anglo-Saxon settlements in England and followed an unbroken narrative through thirteen subsequent centuries, comes to an abrupt conclusion after a detailed description of the Battle of Waterloo. In contrast, an epilogue, offering a bald political outline of the nineteenth century, lasts only seven pages. Anthony Brundage argues that the inadequacy of the nineteenth-century section stemmed from Green being “impatient to complete the book” due to his sense of impending morbidity, and Green did draw up an outline of his intended final chapter.⁶¹ A letter to Edward Freeman suggests practical considerations were a factor: “The truth was that when I reached 1660 I had to face the fact that the book must have an end, and that I must end it in about 800 pp.”⁶² On the other hand, when he developed his History into an extended four-volume edition (1878–1880), it does not extend any further chronologically than the Short History; in fact, it ends decisively with “the return of Louis the Eighteenth to the throne of the Bourbons” in 1815, and completely eschews any depiction of Britain post-Napoleonic Wars.⁶³ The brief epilogue that Green offers in his Short History on events post-1815 certainly reveals a discomfort about pronouncing on the significances of his own lifetime.

The majority of Green’s Short History is written from the lofty heights of an all-illuminating overview. For example, a section about the fourteenth-century founder of the Lollard movement, John Wyclif, is entitled “The First Protestant”, despite the fact that this term, not invented until the end of the 1520s, would have meant absolutely nothing to Wyclif

⁵⁹ Leslie Stephen, ed., The Letters of John Richard Green (London: Macmillan, 1901), 104.

⁶⁰ See Bonnie G. Smith, The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 2000), 116–120.

⁶¹ Brundage, The People’s Historian, 95.

⁶² J. R. Green to Edward Freeman, 18 Jan 1875. Stephen, ed., The Letters of John Richard Green, 408.

⁶³ J. R. Green, A History of the English People, vol. 5 (New York: Useful Knowledge Publishing Company, 1882), 490.

himself or his followers.⁶⁴ These assessments, however, are often tempered with personal detail, as evident in this description of a famous historical figure:

William the Great, as men of his own day styled him, William the Conqueror, as by one event he stamped himself on our history, was now Duke of Normandy. The full grandeur of his indomitable will, his large and patient statesmanship, the loftiness of aim which lifts him out of the petty incidents of his age, were as yet only partly disclosed. (Green, *Short History*, 75.)

This kind of character sketch, which presents “William the Great” as an individual with whom Green is well acquainted, takes us momentarily into the eleventh century as a witness to his personality. Almost immediately, though, we—and he—are “lift[ed] . . . out of the petty incidents of his age”. This passage assumes previous knowledge of William the Conqueror on the part of the audience. It also implies that there exists an intrinsic truth about his character, one which is revealed only to the observers of the modern era. His contemporaries were immersed in their present, but William himself saw the longer view, elevated above “the petty incidents” that surrounded him; now, with hindsight, Green suggests, we can all gain an authoritative perspective.

In the brief epilogue dedicated to the events of British history since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, however, Green can no longer claim an external viewpoint.

With the victory of Waterloo we reach a time within the memory of some now living, and the opening of a period of our history, the greatest indeed of all in real importance and interest, but perhaps too near to us as yet to admit of a cool and purely historical treatment. In a work such as the present, at any rate, it will be advisable to limit ourselves from this point to a brief summary of the more noteworthy events which have occurred in our political history since 1815. (Green, *Short History*, 794.)

As this opening paragraph acknowledges, the epilogue is decidedly “brief”, taking little more than a cursory glance at the main political events of the period, and proceeding year by year with each sentence rather than taking time to delineate those vivid panoramas and portraits that populate the earlier pages of the *History*. The reason for this is all too apparent in his opening caveat: he believes the period of living memory is “too near to us as yet” to allow a “purely historical treatment”. In this small phrase, Green detaches the post-Napoleonic period from the realm of “history”. The concluding sentence of his epic *History* makes no attempt to take an overview of proceedings:

Mr Gladstone felt himself forced, in 1874, to consult public opinion by a dissolution of Parliament; and the return of a Conservative majority of nearly seventy members was necessarily followed by his retirement from office, Mr Disraeli again becoming First Minister of the Crown. (Green, *Short History*, 803.)

This abrupt ending to the grand narrative of “the English People” is strangely out of keeping with the tone of the main body of the text. In the rest of the volume, Green is unafraid to make politically partisan comments on his protagonists; in this final section, however, he takes pains to retain a strictly neutral tone, refusing to arbitrate, in the passive rhetoric of “felt himself forced” and “necessarily followed”, between arch-rivals Gladstone and Disraeli. It demonstrates the extent of Green’s evident discomfort about making any overarching generalizations or judgments on the history of his own recent past.

⁶⁴ Green, *A Short History of the English People*, 240. Hereafter cited parenthetically as Green, *Short History*.

Spencer Walpole

Sir Spencer Walpole (1839–1907) manages more consistently, in his History of England from the Conclusion of the Great War in 1815 (1878), to impose a systematic view of his temporal remit, between 1815 and the mid-1850s. He does so by giving up any attempt to characterize it as a single entity, instead breaking it down into more manageable units. Although now the least known of the three writers under discussion, Walpole was a quietly distinguished figure during his lifetime, and was knighted in 1898. Born into an eminent political family, his long-standing civil service career culminated in a post as Governor of the Isle of Man between 1882 and 1893. In his two works of national British history, A History of England from the Conclusion of the Great War in 1815 (1878–1886), and The History of Twenty-Five Years, 1856–1880 (1904), he shook off his prestigious Tory heritage, to present a liberal and progressivist view of the nineteenth century. Although on their first publication, his histories were well-received, he has since faded into obscurity.⁶⁵ H. C. G. Matthew's portrait of Walpole for the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography judges his legacy in muted terms, but suggests that his History "played an important part in codifying the progressive calendar."⁶⁶ And the opening of Walpole's "Preface to the Revised Edition" of 1890 certainly supports that claim. It declares,

The History of England from 1815 to the present time may be conveniently grouped into distinct periods. ... The first of these periods, during which Englishmen enjoyed less real liberty than at any time since the Revolution of 1688, was a period of Reaction; the second of them, memorable for five great revolutions in law, in commerce, in foreign policy, in religion, and in organic politics, was a period of Reform; the third, which deals not only with the successes of the Whigs under Grey, but with their failures under Melbourne, is concerned with the decline and fall of the Whig Ministry; the fourth relates the triumph of Free Trade.⁶⁷

This comfortable and confident division of the years from 1815 to 1849 into four clear temporal categories acts to turn this complex and multiple time period into a manageable, compartmentalized narrative. It views it as a self-contained entity: Walpole's narratorial viewpoint here is utterly external to these events. Viewing them from above in their entirety allows him to partition them into their "distinct periods". It uses a stadial model of history to help transform the multiplicity of memory into the singularity of history, and by 1890, when Walpole wrote this Preface, at least the first half of the century seemed distant enough to be codified into such units.

Walpole deals with the resultant problem—how to mold an engaging narrative from impersonal trends—by employing a rhetoric of organic development. A chapter on the events from the close of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 until the death of George III in 1820, for example, is entitled "The Last of the Ebb Tide". This instantly labels this period as the end of an era, and, as a "tide", part of a larger inevitable shift. This evocation of organic narrative shapes is continued in the main text. In assessing the causes of, and responsibility for, the French Revolution, Walpole writes,

The course which the Revolution took was horrible, but its excesses may more justly be attributed to the previous conduct of the court than to the ferocity of the people. The

⁶⁵ Even P. B. M. Blaas' in-depth study mentions Walpole's Life of Lord John Russell (1889). See Blaas, Continuity and Anachronism: Parliamentary and Constitutional Development in Whig Historiography and in the Anti-Whig Reaction Between 1890 and 1930 (The Hague; Boston: M. Nijhoff, 1978), 101.

⁶⁶ Matthew, "Walpole, Sir Spencer (1839–1907)."

⁶⁷ Spencer Walpole, A History of England from the Conclusion of the Great War in 1815, 6 vols. (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1890), I, v.

farther the arrow is drawn back the farther it will fly, the harder the blow the stronger the rebound. The strength of reaction is measured by the force of the movement which it succeeds. . . . The force of the flood swept away the men who had raised the sluice gates.⁶⁸

This use of axioms drawn from the laws of physics imply that historical causation is a force of unassailable power. And Walpole does not use valuable time or text arguing for the validity of his metaphors. His tone assumes that these narrative shapes—these tides, forces and floods—are self-evident, clear for all to see.

The narrative arcs Walpole evokes are presented as not only natural but inevitable, in a framework that makes the historian an utterly detached and omniscient figure. His first chapter opens:

The story of Waterloo forms the natural and appropriate conclusion of the long and exciting chapter of European history by which it is preceded. The dark war cloud, which has lowered for a quarter of a century over Europe, rolled away with the last wreath of smoke which hung over Napoleon's defeated and disorganized host. A long and cruel war was to be followed by a long and remarkable peace. A brighter dawn was to usher in a happier day. . . . The ploughshare had been beaten, twenty-four years before, into the sword; the sword was to be converted into a pruning-hook.⁶⁹

This intertextual allusion to the Book of Isaiah 2:4 is more than mere echo: it actively transforms the temporal mode of the Biblical image. In the original, “they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks” takes place in an atemporal heavenly realm. Here, Walpole appropriates a sense of cosmic grandeur for his history by transforming this into a chronological process of which war is a necessary part, and in which the “pruning-hook” signifies God's approval of the reforms to come. The strange past-future tense of this passage, evident in “was to be followed . . . was to usher . . . was to be converted”, positions him temporally in a way that further elides author and deity. Walpole is narrating the future from a nominal point in the past, in 1815. However, there is more than a hint of stage directions about this phrasing: “was to be followed” sounds like it had been instructed to happen. In assuming the mantle of this omniscient figure, temporally and causally detached from the events he narrates, Walpole removes his assessment from any sense of provisionality. He disavows any qualitative continuity with his own time, placing it firmly in a separate category of “history”, and proclaiming an overview perspective. At the time of publication in 1878, the Battle of Waterloo, at little more than “sixty years hence”, was still on the edge of living memory; nonetheless, his presentation of this period is strikingly more insistently “historical” than that of J. R. Green only four years earlier.

Conclusion

All these writers confronted the same problem: how to create a coherent narrative out of the diverse, contentious and inconclusive material of their nation's recent past. They did so, however, in quite different historiographical environments. When Martineau was writing, the academic discipline of History had not yet been established, and so she was freer to move between the perspectives of overview and immersion than were later Green and Walpole. In her *History* we nonetheless already see overview accorded a superior status to that of immersion. Martineau includes those events and individuals who normally fall below the

⁶⁸ Walpole, *History of England*, I, 4.

⁶⁹ Walpole, *History of England*, I, 1.

radar of the historical record. Ultimately, however, she succumbs to a desire for singularity, reverting to the trope of 'nation' to enable her to offer a unified narrative.

By the time that Green and Walpole were writing, in the 1870s, this hierarchy of historiographical priorities had become increasingly dominant. Green, like Martineau, struggled with contradictory desires. He proclaimed his *History* one of the "English People", but in practice the text is inhabited by the familiar figures of political history. Once he reaches the period of living memory, moreover, he retreats both from partisan investment, and from any attempt at overview. Walpole, attempting to identify impersonal trends in his own century, proclaims a detached viewpoint, and adheres most consistently to one perspective. In doing so, however, he sacrifices some of the vitality of the other two texts, disingenuously disavowing any personal engagement with a subject-matter still current, not only for him, but also for his readers.

Despite their limitations, however, all three case studies do achieve something noteworthy, in going against the grain of the emerging historical discipline, and questioning the sacred necessity of temporal distance. In Raphael Samuel's characterization of Maurice Halbwachs' delineation of the division between "memory" and "history", he declares: "History began when memory faded".⁷⁰ Harriet Martineau, J. R. Green and Spencer Walpole refuse to wait for this memory to fade.

⁷⁰ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, vol. 1 (London: Verso, 1996), ix.